

Attachment Theory and Social Work Treatment

Name

Course

Lecturer

Date

Attachment Theory and Social Work Treatment in Families

Introduction

The theory of attachment and how it can be practically applied have once again emerged as important aspects of determining the quality of the relationship between a child and their caregivers (Shriver, 2011, p. 122-123). Difficulties in the place of children in the family setting have also been associated with attachment. Foster care has emerged as a popular option for children in most countries especially those that have to deal with HIV/AIDS pandemic that have resulted in many orphans being left behind and unattended. The practical use of the attachment theory has found a place in the assessment, development and supervision of the relationships in children care systems like foster care and normal families. A definition of foster care has been given to the rearing or nursing of children in an establishment or by people that are not their natural parents.

John Bowlby developed attachment theory as a psychoanalytic theory in the 1960s. His theory defined the relationship that exists between a child and the mother (Turner, 1974, p. 23). He studied the importance of this bond and the impact the bond has on the child's life. At a larger scale, he was studying the significance of the bond between a mother and their child among all species. He established that this bond was the very foundation for the survival of a species. The primary caregiver provided their offspring with protection from any harm. They also gave the infants a chance to explore the environment around them. By so doing, Bowlby established a field of thought on the bond between a caregiver and a child. The researcher was able to postulate that there were complications in the child's life whenever such a bond was broken or disrupted. Scholars like Walters, Belhar, Wall, and Ainsworth have since refined this

theory (Fahlberg, 2012, p. 301). The theory has been developed to be more applicable when trying to classify the attachment relationships. Such relationships can thus be categorized as either secure or insecure. Patterns of attachment have been developed and are referred to as either insecure-avoidant or insecure-ambivalent patterns. A method named the strange situation has also been since developed in the determination of the attachment patterns in children. The correlation of the quality of the relationship between the attachment and the quality of care an infant receives has been determined. This correlation emerged as the basic assumption for users of this theory.

Attachment theory has been defined as the inclusive pool of knowledge that is associated with any growth in the children attachment field. Attachment is the development of a bond that is emotional in nature between a child and their primary caregiver. The caregiver can either be biological or a non-blood related individual. This theory is in a continuous evolution of the emergence of new research results. For this reason, giving an overview of all the concepts in the theory is very complicated. This paper, therefore, attempts to discuss the main theoretical issues in the application of this theory to how children are placed in any family setting. The application and knowledge of some of the main concepts of the theory as some of the aspects social workers in the placement of children in foster care have to understand (Turner, 1974, p. 43, 45 & 47). It also gives guidelines in assessing if children are comfortable living with their parents whether foster or natural.

It has been observed that children entering into new families often experience complications in the attachment. The reason behind these complications can be placed on the fact that some of the children have been through traumatic periods before they were placed in these new homes (Fahlberg, 2012, p. 300). The children will after sometimes indicate some changes in

behavior that can be either mild or severe. These changes in behavior could psychologically be described as hyperactivity, eating and defiant disorders, and in some cases depression. Children in new families are often at a risk of developing school related problems or delays in growth and development. The result is a more demanding situation to their foster parents or caregivers. Due to such complications, the placements often do not end up being successful and may fall. Due to other underlying issues and the collapse of these arrangements, the children form attachments patterns that are ineffective and result in serious consequences on their lives. The increase in the failure associated how children adapt in new family settings has been associated with a failure in the bonding or attachment between them and their caregivers (Turner, 1974, p. 50).

Research has indicated that contextual factors associated with the attachment system were directly linked with the increase in the stability of the system (Fahlberg, 2012, p. 301). Such contextual factors are the level of contact, the positive relationship between the parents and the supporting agency, the building of rapport and the continuity of the caseworker in the program. The interest of the social worker and their continuity in the child's case has a big impact on the placement of a child in foster care or one who is not comfortable at their home. A social worker who has a good understanding of the issues that are related to attachment and who supervises the entire family adaptability process has a bigger rate of success in the stability of the family and the union (Fahlberg, 2012, p. 311). There have been concerns after the establishment of the above facts whether children social workers are aware of their impact on the children attachment and the success of their adaptability in their homes. Another bulging question among many interested parties is whether the social officers have the knowledge of the attachment theory and the application concepts of the theory. The knowledge and understanding of the main aspects relationships in attachments can be of assistance to social workers develop practices that

are sensitive to the establishment of a bond between children and their parents. The social workers will be able to identify and solve problems that may emerge in any family. There currently exist a big fault between the role of social workers in the placement programs and the eventual success and stability of these establishments in foster homes. The gap still exist when supervising children still living with their biological parents Having the required knowledge and concepts on the attachment theory and the application of such knowledge has a positive impact on forming secure bonds between children and their parents. The result could be an overall success in the placement and the stability of both foster and normal families (Fahlberg, 2012, p. 302, Shriver, 2011, p. 129).

The basic interaction between a child and a mother forms the foundation of how the child will relate to other people and the world at large. The need to develop such a bond is natural and universal. The formation of such bonds and how they are maintained and developed can be directly affected by the culture and environment. Research from Western sources has necessitated the need to research in other cultures the relationship between a child and the mother. For the good development of the child to occur, there needs to be an adequate attachment between the child and the caregiver. The attachment period begins from birth to the age of eighteen months. By the time the child is a couple of years old, they have formed a discernible attachment pattern that can be said to be either positive or negative. If the relations were good, and there was attentive and concerned care given to the child, there would be the formation of a secure attachment. A sense of belonging and general security emotionally and physically by the child are characteristics of a secure attachment when with their parent (Shriver, 2011, p. 136).

An insecure attachment, however, occurs when care to the child was interfered with by any disturbance between the association of the child and the parent or caregiver. The child feels neglected, and severe consequences may follow during their development process. The child lacks the feeling of security emotionally or physically in the presence of their caregiver. This feeling could affect the process of self-perception of the child. Long-term effects of this perception interference could go on until the children reach adulthood (Fahlberg, 2012, p. 320).

The insecure attachment patterns developed from the attachment theory are insecure avoidant-attachment pattern where the child is withdrawn from their caregiver and at times do not want to be physically contacted by the caregivers. The children may show a pattern of emotional distance from their caregivers. The caregivers, on the other hand, are often angry and annoyed towards the children. Insecure-ambivalent occurs whenever there is a lack of consistency and responsible care of the child being unable to discern their caregivers' reactions to certain basic aspects. There is the development of internal conflict within the child on how available the caregiver is towards their well-being (Shriver, 2011, p. 131). The effects are limited interests in exploring and can become careless and prone to accidents. Insecure-disorganized is where the child lacks the ability to form a predictable pattern from their interaction with their caregiver especially is the caregiver gives frightening reactions to the child. This pattern is common among children who have been neglected, and have faced severe abuse. The insecure-indiscriminate pattern is common among children who have been with several caregivers during their infancy. The child thus fails to form any significant attachment pattern with any of the caregivers. Children with this attachment pattern have a link in developing a reactive attachment disorder. Their behaviors when they are relating with other people are short-

lived and superficial. This disorder is the most common in children in foster homes (Turner, 1974, p.60).

By the age of three years, the children have already developed and internalized their attachment patterns. Their inbuilt expectations are directed towards their relationships with other. They then form a blueprint for how they will interact with others in the future. Their personal experience with themselves and the world around them become stable and a model working internally is created (Shriver, 2011, p. 135). The model will then act as a guide in the individual's behavioral characteristics and may affect their decisions, relationships, self-perception and their general view of life during their entire lifetime. This method of using a strange situation has been effectively used in the assessment of young children. There is, however, no standardized assessment method for older children and adolescents. There are some more complex assessment methods for older children. The challenge here is that many social workers may be unaware of their applicability to the assessment of how effective the attachment of these children is with their foster or even biological caregivers (Fahlberg, 2012, p. 320).

Conclusion

Attachment theory is an area that most social workers should focus. The theory adequately gives guidelines on how to best assess the development of children in any family setting. It also gives a way of solving relationship problems between children and their parents. Social workers ought to understand the importance of the establishment of a bond between children and their caregivers. The development of a positive attachment pattern will ensure the success and stability of the foster and normal families. Lack of basic knowledge in the attachment theory and its application can lead to a negative bond between children and their

caregivers that will see the establishment fall. Knowledgeable caregivers follow up on their children cases and can solve any of the problems that may emerge between the children and their primary caregivers. Caregivers can be advised to form a positive bond with their foster or biological children by providing the necessary care and attention the children will need. In so doing, theirs will be a natural bond between a child and a parent that will make the child grow in a normal and healthy manner. Social workers have to be adequately equipped with tools that will enable them understand the application of the theory of attachment in the course of their duty in childcare services.

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